

## PARENT, PEER, AND MEDIA INFLUENCES ON GENERATION XERS PRICE PERCEPTIONS

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*This study addresses how information sources such as parents, peers and the media, influence Gen Xers' price perceptions. This communication about the consumption of goods and services can have an effect on the adolescents' motivations and beliefs about consumption activities. Specifically addressed are Gen Xers' levels of prestige sensitivity and price consciousness. Findings suggest that the greater the communication young adults have with parents and peers, and the more they look to media types as a source of information about consumption, the greater the effect this will have on their pricing perceptions.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Generation X is one of the most important yet challenging targets for marketers. Approximately forty-eight million consumers are between the ages of seventeen and twenty-nine in the United States alone (Census 2000). This group has been labeled Generation X and is made up of consumers who are self-reliant, entrepreneurial, supportive of racial and sexual diversity, better educated than any previous generation, and are likely to pursue lifestyles and prefer products and services that are very different from baby boomers (Gleckman 1997). This is also the generation that has been bombarded by multiple media since they were young children, and as a result tend to be savvy and cynical consumers, yet more materialistic than past generations (Mitchell 1993).

Although the birth years between 1965 and 1976 are often used to delineate this group (Mitchell 1993), many companies in the credit card, banking, fashion, tobacco, and alcohol industries target a younger subset of this group (i.e., early twenties) in their marketing efforts. Jennings (1995), for example, has reported on the aggressive marketing of credit cards to college

students stating that the acquisition of a credit card is easier while in college than after graduation. There are over one billion credit cards in the United States (Ritzer 1995), and many are in the hands of college students. In a recent study of college students, Roberts (1998) found that 29 percent of the students owned three or more credit cards. Fashion, tobacco, and alcohol companies have traditionally targeted young adults in their twenties with messages focusing on social status and material possessions.

From a consumer policy perspective, today's young adults have been raised in a media saturated environment with a great deal of advertising appealing to the desire for status and instant gratification (Roberts 1998). Gen Xers' are heavy television watchers and were the first generation to have access to cable TV during their early years. Pollay (1986) suggests that television advertising reinforces the materialism ideal among members of society. Furthermore, Roberts (1998) found a positive correlation between college students' heavy TV viewing and compulsive buying. Does this unique socialization among Gen Xers' influence their shopping behaviors in a positive or negative way?

In sum, college students today are a generation that: has been raised with cable TV, tends to be more materialistic than previous generations, is given credit cards while still in college, and is vulnerable to

emotional appeals. This is definitely an important market segment worth investigating from marketing management and consumer policy perspectives. This study will attempt to explore the role parents, peers, and televisions have on shaping the consumer behavior of this group. Is this next generation of young adults smart value conscious shoppers or have they been socialized to be irrational consumers in search of prestige and status? An investigation into how various socialization agents influence this groups' perceptions toward buying, and in particular pricing, may help policy makers and marketers understand future spending and debt patterns of young adults.

Price perception, the process by which consumers translate prices into meaningful cognitions, has interested researchers for years (Lichtenstein, Bloch and Black, 1988) and makes an interesting vantage point from which to explore this subset of Gen Xers' values. According to Jacoby and Olsen (1977), the actual price a consumer sees can activate the perception process which includes the development of an attitude toward that price. Moreover, while consumers exposed to the same price cue receive the same objective information, each individual may assign unique meanings to the price based on his or her own perceptions or frame of reference.

The different meanings a consumer may attribute to a price cue are related to the integration of the price cues with other sources of stored information the individual learned via socialization. Consumer socialization is a traditional research stream which is based on "the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning in the marketplace" (Ward 1980, p. 380). Three of the major sources of influence identified by consumer socialization include parents, peers, and the media (e.g., Churchill and Moschis 1979; Robertson 1979; Brittain 1980; Moore and Moschis 1981). While consumer socialization has been used extensively to explain and predict how consumers make a myriad of consumption-related decisions, it has not been utilized to examine the effect socialization may have on shaping young adults' perceptions of price.

Hence, the objective of this study is to explore the influence consumer socialization agents such as parents, peers, and the media may have on a subset of Generation Xers' price perceptions. First, the conceptual foundation of consumer socialization is reviewed. Next, we will discuss the price perceptions of price consciousness and prestige sensitivity within the consumer socialization framework. Finally, parent, peer, and media influences will be assessed regarding their influence on Generation Xers' price perceptions. Implications from the research will also be given for marketers, advertising managers and public policy makers in an attempt to gain further insights into the perceptions and values of this important market segment.

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

### The Socialization Model

Consumer socialization is the process by which young people develop consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Ward 1974, 1980; Moschis and Churchill 1978). It emphasizes sources of influence or socialization agents which transmit norms, attitudes, motivations, and behaviors to the learner. The socialization agent may be any person or organization directly involved in socialization because of frequency of contact with the learner (Moschis and Churchill 1978). The end result of the socialization process is often termed "outcomes" or consumer skills (Moore and Stephens 1975). Such skills or outcomes represent a variety of consumer behavior activities such as materialism, consumer activism, marketplace knowledge, skepticism toward advertising, etc.

There are a number of influences that an individual consumer comes into contact with, directly or indirectly, that can potentially shape the consumer's consumption-related decisions and actions (Bandura 1977). To date, peers, mothers, fathers, and the media have been studied in terms of their influence on consumption-related behaviors of younger consumers (cf. Carlson, Grossbart and Walsh 1990; Carlson, Walsh, Lacznia and Grossbart 1994; Keillor, Parker and Schaefer 1996; O'Guinn and Shrum 1997;

Martin and Bush 2000). Another study demonstrated that college students' socialization influences influence their attitudes toward advertising (Bush, Smith and Martin 1999).

Past research has examined adolescents' propensity to imitate and learn non-consumption-related and consumption-related behaviors of parents, siblings, and teachers, each of which are seen as positive role models for adolescents. Carlson, Grossbart and Walsh (1990) found that adolescents' goals and attitudes are directly impacted by parental perceptions of the marketplace. Keillor et al. (1996) have shown that adolescents in both the Mexico and the United States rely heavily on their siblings when making brand preference decisions for high and low involvement products. Although most studies have not specifically used Generation Xers' as a sample, research has shown that product preferences, attitudes about marketing activities, skills and shopping styles are transmitted from one generation to another (Viswanathan, Childers and Moore 2000). This suggests that although members of Generation X are no longer considered adolescents, information that they might have learned during their adolescence might still be affecting their consumption patterns and pricing perceptions.

The socialization agents chosen for this study were parents, peers and the media (social utility of ads). They were deemed relevant to price perceptions such as price consciousness and prestige sensitivity because of previous research that indicates they play a significant role in consumer socialization (Ward 1974; Moschis and Churchill 1978; Bush, Smith and Martin 1999).

Price consciousness and prestige sensitivity were the socialization outcomes chosen for this study. These pricing constructs relate to the respondents' price perceptions which have been developed and shaped over time. It is this process of learning and modeling that is of interest here. This study was designed to show potential sources of influence on this learning process, and hypothesized the direction of this influence on the selected socialization outcomes, prestige sensitivity and price consciousness.

Socialization may provide important insights into understanding Generation Xers' pricing perceptions which may shed light on their shopping orientation and behavior.

### Price Perceptions

Price is perhaps one of the most important marketplace cues for consumers today. Researchers have noted that price is a complex stimulus and consumers perceive price in many different ways based on their backgrounds and frames of reference (Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer 1993). Dickson and Sawyer have stated: "what is clear is that shoppers are very heterogeneous in terms of their attention and reaction to price and price promotions" (1990, p. 51). Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer (1993) discovered these differences in their research and identified seven different price perceptions among consumers. Five of these perceptions focused more on perceptions of price in its "negative role" (e.g., price consciousness, coupon proneness) and two in its "positive role" (e.g., prestige sensitivity). For our exploratory study assessing the impact socialization agents may have on price perceptions, we selected one perception of price in its negative role (price consciousness) and one in its positive role (prestige sensitivity).

These two pricing perceptions were chosen for several reasons. First, based on the Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer (1993) study, these two measures best represent price in a negative and positive role when searching or using information. For example, when all seven price perception measures were correlated with the response variable low price search, price consciousness had the most positive standardized beta (.213) and prestige sensitivity had the lowest and most negative beta (-.88). Moreover, these two measures appear to be more global measures of price perceptions than the other measures (i.e., price mavenism, sale proneness, coupon proneness). Additionally, each of the two selected measures most closely parallels socialization theory. Prestige sensitivity focuses more on what the price signals to others and how high prices makes one feel. Whereas, price consciousness is based on the

degree to which the consumer uses price in its negative role as a decision-making criterion.

Price consciousness is a pricing perception that is held by an individual, in which he or she places varying degrees of importance on price. Past literature suggests that if a person is price conscious, that consumer is focused on finding and paying low prices for items he or she desires (Lichtenstein, Bloch and Black 1988; Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer 1993). This suggests that individual consumers might be unwilling to pay a high price for a product, even if that consumer has the ability to pay the higher price. Also, these consumers might be unwilling to pay for unique or identifying features of a product, if those features result in that product being higher priced than some competitor's product (Monroe and Petroschius 1981). This consciousness is related to the monetary outlay needed to obtain an item, not the consumers' level of knowledge about a certain product type. These consumers might be highly knowledgeable about a certain product and still be very price conscious, while not knowledgeable in another product area and be less price conscious, with the opposite also possibly being true. The present study proposes that this price perception is a learned behavior and can be formed through interaction with a number of information sources such as peers, parents and advertisements.

For this study prestige sensitivity is defined as "favorable perceptions of the price cue based on feelings of prominence and status that higher prices signal to other people about the purchaser" (Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer 1993, p. 236). This perception is positively related to price, whereas price consciousness is negatively related to price. Prestige sensitivity suggests that consumers might make inferences based upon a product's price and how others will perceive them as a consumer if they purchase a particular product (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Burton 1990). An example would be when a consumer perceives the high price of a product to reflect some traits internal to themselves, and that others witnessing the purchase or consumption of these goods or services can identify these traits.

This sensitivity can occur in both the consumer's perceptions of others, and in the consumer's perceptions of how others see him or herself. By that we mean consumers who are prestige sensitive tend to make attributions about other consumers who may be purchasing or consuming a high priced item, as well as perceive others as making attributions about them when they personally consume such goods and services (Calder and Burnkrant 1977). These consumers create these perceptions according to their past experience, background, and preferences (McGowan and Sternquist 1998).

If in fact consumers utilize information sources such as parents, peers and advertisements when creating their own perceptions about price consciousness and prestige sensitivity, then we expect significant correlations between the socialization agents (information sources) and the levels of price consciousness and prestige sensitivity in the subjects' responses.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

### Socialization Agents

*Parents.* The degree to which parents and adolescents interact and communicate with each other about consumption of goods and services can have an effect on the adolescents' motivations and beliefs about consumption activities. Moschis and Churchill (1978) suggest that the greater the amount of communication about consumption that occurs between the family members, the greater the degree the adolescent holds economic motivations for consumption. Other consumer skills that can be affected by parental communication are that of pricing beliefs. Moore and Stephens (1975) found that specific communication between the parents and children about consumption predicts young adults' knowledge of prices. If parents are in fact a source of information that young adults use to create their own pricing perceptions, then the amount of parental communication should have an impact on pricing outcomes. These findings suggest the following hypotheses.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Parental communication about consumption-related activities is related positively to Generation Xers' level of price consciousness.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Parental communication about consumption-related activities is related positively to the Generation Xers' level of prestige sensitivity.

*Peers.* Young adults tend to also look to their peers for a source of information and are influenced by these peers as well (Campbell 1969). Moschis and Churchill (1978) showed that the greater the peer communication, the more positive the individual's social motivations for consumption. This suggests that young adults will tend to look to peers as a source of information about consumption, and that the greater the communication that occurs between peers about consumption, the greater the effect on social outcome variables such as price consciousness and prestige sensitivity. This literature suggests the following hypotheses.

- H<sub>3</sub>: Peer communication about consumption-related activities is related positively to Generation Xers' level of price consciousness.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Peer communication about consumption-related activities is related positively to Generation Xers' level of prestige sensitivity.

*Social Utility of Ads.* Past research has found that mass media can be considered an important socialization agent (Bandura 1969, 1971; Moschis and Churchill 1978; Bush, Smith and Martin 1999). This research shows a strong relationship between the amount of TV viewing and an individual's social motivation for consumption. Moschis and Churchill (1978) found that the more an individual watched ads for social utility reasons such as a means for gathering product and pricing information, the greater that individual's level of materialism and social motivations for consumption. This would suggest that

if young adults use ads as a means of identifying and gathering information about products and prices, then this would affect their levels of price consciousness and prestige sensitivity. Thus the following hypotheses are suggested.

- H<sub>5</sub>: Social utility reasons for watching/reading/listening to advertisements are related positively to Generation Xers' level of price consciousness.
- H<sub>6</sub>: Social utility reasons for watching/reading/listening to advertisements are related positively to Generation Xers' level of prestige sensitivity.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Sample

Our study consisted of undergraduate students at a large mid-south university. Respondents were given a survey instrument and asked to record information about their interaction with their parents and peers, their use of ads for pricing information, and information regarding their price perceptions. This was completed in the presence of an interviewer. The total sample consisted of 150 respondents between the ages of 20 and 25, of which 83 were female (55 percent) and 65 were male (43 percent), with two respondents failing to indicate their gender (see Table 1).

### Independent Variables

*Parental Interaction.* In this study we used a modified version of the Moschis and Moore (1984) scale for family communication about consumption. This 4-item scale attempted to tap such beliefs as "My parents and I talked about things we saw or heard advertised," and "I got my parents to buy things that were advertised." The resulting alpha for the scale was .72.

*Peer Communication.* The peer communication scale used in this study was a modification of the Moschis (1981) scale for peer communication about

consumption. We utilized a 3-item scale which measured beliefs such as "I spend a lot of time talking with my friends about products and brands," and "I often seek out the advice of my friends regarding which brand to buy." This scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .82.

**TABLE 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

	Respondent Numbers and Percentages	
<b>Parental Education Level</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>
Some High School	5 (3%)	7 (4%)
High School Graduate	38 (25%)	40 (27%)
Some College	41 (27%)	49 (33%)
College Graduate or More	63% (42%)	50 (33%)
Missing	3 (3%)	4 (3%)
<b>Living Arrangements as a Child</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
Lived with both parents	97 (65%)	
Lived with 1 parent exclusively	15 (10%)	
Split time between 1 and 2 parents	24 (16%)	
Split time between parents and friends	19 (9%)	
<b>Race of Respondents</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
African-American	68 (45%)	
Caucasian	82 (55%)	
<b>Gender of Respondents</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
Female	83 (55%)	
Male	65 (43%)	
Missing	2 (2%)	

*Social Utility of Ads.* To measure the respondents' perceived social utility of ads we utilized a modified version of Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel's scale (1989) which measures social utility reasons for watching/reading and listening to ads. Examples of items used include, "I often consult advertisements to

help choose the best alternative available from a product class," and "To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often look at advertisements to see what others are buying or using." Our 4-item version of the scale had an alpha of .79.

### Dependent Variables

*Price Consciousness.* We attempted to tap into the individual respondent's perception of this negative price cue by utilizing a 5-item scale introduced into the literature by Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer (1993). This measure used a 5-point "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" scale. Items were designed to determine the respondents' level of price consciousness and were done so with items such as "The money saved by finding low prices is usually not worth the time and effort," and "I would shop at more than one store to find low prices." Negatively worded items were reverse coded so that higher scores consistently represented a respondent who was more price conscious. The 5-items had a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

*Prestige Sensitivity.* We attempted to identify the individual respondent's perception of this positive price cue by utilizing a 5-item modified version of the scale introduced into the literature by Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer (1993). This measure used a 5-point "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" scale. Items were designed to determine the respondents' prestige sensitivity, and this was done with items such as "It says something to people when you buy the high priced version of a product," and "Even for a relatively inexpensive product, I think that buying a costly brand is impressive." Again, negatively worded items were reverse coded so that higher scores consistently represented a respondent that was more price conscious. The 5-items had a Cronbach's alpha of .81. The measures used in the study are presented in the Appendix.

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis.* Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the dimensionality of the scales utilized in this study. We subjected the data to a confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 8.30 (Joreskog and Sorbom 1999). Considered a

more rigorous test than exploratory factor analysis (Kelloway 1998), confirmatory factor analysis specifies a measurement model a priori to restrict the possible number of factors in the solution (Gerbing and Anderson 1988). As seen in Table II, the standardized parameter estimate results of the confirmatory factor analysis provide strong support for the unidimensionality of the scales.

All of the standardized parameter estimates shown in Table 2 are greater than or equal to .60, indicating significant explained variance from each item. Additionally, the goodness of fit index is .86, the root mean squared residual is .05, the incremental fit index is .822, and the normed fit index is .76. These fit statistics indicate that overall model fit is acceptable for social science research (Bagozzi and Yi 1988).

## RESULTS

In an attempt to assess the overall associations between the independent and dependent variables, correlation coefficients were calculated and are presented in Table 3. The results show statistical significance for five of the six relationships at the 0.05 level. Parental and peer communications have positive relationships with price consciousness and, parents, peers and social utility for advertising are all positively related to prestige sensitivity.

A regression model was created in which the independent variables were entered as a block, and by doing so the predictive ability of parental communication, peer communication and the social utility of ads on young adults' level of price consciousness can be examined. The results for  $H_1$ ,  $H_3$ , and  $H_5$  were determined by analyzing the standardized beta coefficients for parental communication, peer communication levels, and social utility of ads, along with their significance levels. The results are presented in Table 4. It was found that the model had an adjusted  $R^2$  of .056,  $F = 3.805$ ,  $p < 0.012$ ; with parental communication being a significant positively related predictor of price consciousness. For  $H_1$ , parental communication had a standardized beta coefficient of 0.201 and a t-value of 2.299. This was found to be significant at the

0.023 level. This indicates that higher levels of communication between parents and young adults leads to the respondent being more price conscious. For  $H_3$ , peer communication had a standardized beta coefficient of 0.159 and a t-value of 1.705. This was found to be nonsignificant at the 0.09 level. This indicates that communication that occurs between a person and their peers does not significantly affect the level of price consciousness the person will exhibit. For  $H_5$ , perceived social utility of ads was not found to be a significant predictor of price consciousness ( $t = -0.033$ ,  $p < 0.732$ ). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported, while hypotheses 3 and 5 were not.

Since the dependent measures were separate constructs another regression model was created to assess the predictive ability of parental communication, peer communication and the social utility of ads on young adults' level of prestige sensitivity. The results for  $H_2$ ,  $H_4$ , and  $H_6$  were determined by analyzing the standardized beta coefficients for parental communication, peer communication levels, and social utility of ads, along with their significance levels. The results are presented in Table 5. It was found that the model had an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.135,  $F = 8.380$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ; with both peer communication and social utility of ads being significant positively related predictors of prestige sensitivity.

For  $H_2$ , parental communication levels were not found to be a significant predictor of prestige sensitivity ( $t = 0.491$ ,  $p < 0.624$ ). For  $H_4$ , peer communication had a standardized beta coefficient of 0.197 and a t-value of 2.220. This was found to be significant at the 0.028 level. This indicates that the more communication that occurs between a person and his or her peers, the greater the level of prestige sensitivity the person will exhibit. For  $H_6$ , social utility of ads had a standardized beta coefficient of 0.240 and a t-value of 2.653. This was found to be significant at the 0.009 level. This indicates that the more respondents look to ads for social utility reasons, the higher the level of prestige sensitivity they will exhibit. Thus, hypotheses 4 and 6 were supported, while hypothesis 2 was not.

**TABLE 2**  
**Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results. LISREL estimates using Maximum Likelihood**

Scale:	Peer Interact	Social Utility	Parent Comm	Price Consciousness	Prestige
Scale Item					
Peer 1	0.742				
Peer 2	0.839				
Peer 3	0.741				
Social 1		0.670			
Social 2		0.768			
Social 3		0.805			
Social 4		0.623			
Parent 1			0.640		
Parent 2			0.934		
Parent 3			0.912		
Parent 4			0.609		
Price 1				0.639	
Price 2				0.750	
Price 3				0.805	
Price 4				0.714	
Price 5				0.835	
Prestige 1					0.605
Prestige 2					0.772
Prestige 3					0.852
Prestige 4					0.647
Prestige 5					0.719

**TABLE 3**  
**Correlation coefficients between the socialization agents and price perceptions.**

Socialization Agents	Price Consciousness	Prestige Sensitivity
Parent interaction	.234**	.179*
Peer interaction	.212*	.306**
Social utility of ads	.116	.331**

\*Significant at the 0.05 level.  
 \*\*Significant at the 0.01 level.

**TABLE 4**  
**Regression analyses: the socialization agents and price consciousness**

Socialization Agents	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> for Model	Standardized Beta Coefficients	t-value	Significance
	0.056			
Parents		0.201*	2.299	p<0.023
Peers		0.159	1.705	p<0.090
Social Utility of Ads		-0.033	-0.34	p<0.732

\*Significant at the 0.05 level.

**TABLE 5**  
**Regression analyses: the socialization agents and prestige sensitivity**

Socialization Agents	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> for Model	Standardized Beta Coefficients	t-value	Significance
	0.135			
Parents		0.041	0.491	p<0.624
Peers		0.197*	2.220	p<0.028
Social Utility of Ads		0.240**	2.653	p<0.009

\*Significant at the 0.05 level.  
 \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level.

## IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the present study indicate that specific relationships between consumer socialization variables and price perceptions do exist. Results indicate that parental communication and peer communication positively influence the price consciousness of Generation X consumers. These results suggest that the more Generation X consumers communicate with parents, the more likely this group of consumers will be focused on paying low prices for the goods and services they want to purchase.

Roberts (1998) recently discovered that college students, as members of Generation X, exhibited relatively high levels of compulsive buying. While not as critical as compulsive buying, we do feel that

price perceptions can lead to more rational or even irrational spending habits for this group. Our findings suggest that parents can play an important role in shaping the price perceptions, and ultimately shopping orientations, of their young adult children. Our sample consisted of Gen X college students from one mid-south university. Future research could explore possible differences between Gen Xers' with different social upbringings and who experienced different parental communication styles, in order to examine other factors that might influence pricing perceptions of this generation.

Generation X consumers are currently facing difficult economic environments. This can lead Generation X consumers to search for products that provide them with the greatest quantity at the best price. The results from the present study suggest

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that organizations stressing value and cost should attempt to communicate with the Generation X consumer's parents to indirectly establish their image as a low-cost provider of products. In other words, influencing the opinion leaders of Generation X consumers will likely lead to greater awareness by these consumers that the organization is seeking to satisfy their desire for lower priced goods and services.

For organizations seeking to satisfy this price conscious market, acting quickly to reach these individuals is crucial. Market research indicates that retailers stressing higher-price products for this particular group of consumers will face increasingly difficult times in the near future. Retail spending and profit figures for both American Eagle Outfitters and Abercrombie & Fitch were significantly lower for the year 2000 as compared with previous years (Clifford 2000), verifying the recommendation that Generation X retailers cannot focus on price alone in attempting to reach this target market.

The results from the present study also suggest that peers and mass media communication create Generation X consumers who value the feelings of prominence and status that a higher price signals about them to other people. For the Generation X consumer and his or her peer influences, this signals somewhat of a contradiction as compared to the aforementioned peer influence on price consciousness. It appears that communication with parents causes Generation X consumers to value receiving a product at the best price available. However, communication from peers and mass media causes these consumers to seek products that appear to be high priced so as to establish a certain prestigious image.

From a consumer policy perspective, this relationship also has important implications. One implication is that college students should not be the focus of aggressive media campaigns that focus on status or instant gratification. Since our results show that peers and media can have an influence on a prestige orientation, and this group is particularly

vulnerable to such appeals (Faber, O'Guinn and Krych 1987), protection for this group may be warranted. Possible actions could be to lower credit card limits, advertise the dangers of irrational spending, or to actually seek support from businesses to help educate our future wage earners on rational shopping and debt reduction.

Organizations attempting to satisfy Generation X consumers may have to balance their advertising and encourage word of mouth via the consumers' peer group. As recommended by the results, these organizations must emphasize to Generation X peers that the organization is willing to provide the best price available for the products offered, while maintaining the image of prestige associated with higher priced products.

Finally, the two relationships that are not supported in the present study also have significant implications for organizations targeting Generation X. Initially, no support was shown for social utility communication influencing price consciousness. This would suggest that organizations focusing on lower prices and value might best be served utilizing promotions that focus on word of mouth communications or direct marketing-based sales promotions. If mass media advertising is not influencing Generation X consumers' price consciousness, organizations stressing value and low prices must reach this target market through other means. Likely this would suggest targeting the Generation X consumers' peers, or attempting to reach this group through direct marketing promotions, designed to create positive associations about the organization and its products. Clegg (1999) identifies a number of organizations that are attempting to achieve this communication goal through Internet direct marketing.

The last relationship not supported, indicating that parental communication does not influence the Generation X consumers' prestige sensitivity, suggests that parents are not appropriate targets for indirectly attempting to reach the prestige sensitive members of Generation X. Contrarily, parental communication within this target market most likely

revolves around seeking value, finding the best product available for purchase, or the benefits gained from product purchase (Moschis and Moore 1984). Because of this, organizations are beginning to realize that to reach the Generation X consumer indirectly through their parents, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on either the value associated with the product for sale, or some other product attribute not related to price (Dietz 1999). Organizations that have accepted and profited from this trend, including Hard Rock Café (Siebert 1999) and General Motors (Dietz 1999), are aggressively capitalizing on the price perceptions and spending patterns of Generation X consumers.

In conclusion, it has been shown that Generation X price perceptions are a function of a variety of socialization agents and communication options. For consumer policy makers and marketing managers alike, the results from the present study indicate that selecting the appropriate medium for reaching and communicating with this group may help shape better consumers and, perhaps, lessen consumer debt in the future.

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